DEER HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN
Deer Herd Unit #25
(Plateau)
April 2006

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Sevier, Garfield, Piute, and Wayne counties - Boundary begins at SR-24 and US-89 at Sigurd; south on SR-24 to SR-62; south on SR-62 to SR-22; south on SR-22 to the Widtsoe-Antimony road; south on the Widtsoe-Antimony road to SR-12; east on SR-12 to the Burr Trail at Boulder; east on the Burr Trail to the Notom Road; north on the Notom Road to SR-24; east on SR-24 to the Caineville Wash road; north on the Caineville Wash road to I-70; west on I-70 to US-89; south on US-89 to SR-24.

LAND OWNERSHIP

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP

	Year-long range		Summer Range		Winter Range	
Ownership	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%
Forest Service	5733	90%	659953	85%	355829	27%
Bureau of Land Management	109	1%	18051	2%	495507	38%
Utah State Institutional Trust Lands	0	0	54940	7%	107656	8%
Native American Trust Lands	0	0	0	0%	27	0%
Private	544	9%	38111	5%	119243	9%
Bankhead Jones	0	0	0	0%	341	0%
Wilderness Area	0	0	598	1%	24843	2%
National Parks	0	0	304	0%	193967	15%
Utah State Parks	0	0	0	0%	1080	0%
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	0	0	0	0%	1092	1%
TOTAL	6385	100%	772484	100%	1299640	100%

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

Manage for a population of healthy animals capable of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities, including hunting and viewing. Balance deer herd impacts with human needs, such as private property rights, agricultural crops and local economies. Maintain the population at a level that is within the long-term capability of the available habitat to support.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

< Target Winter Herd Size - Achieve a target population size of 25,000 wintering deer (modeled number). This objective remains the same for both short-term (the 5-year life of this plan) and into the foreseeable future, barring any significant change in the condition of deer range on the unit.

< Sub-unit #25A - 10,000; DCI is presently at the fair/poor threshold.

Depredation issues will continue to be addressed, resulting in some doe harvest. Habitat is not currently being negatively impacted by deer use. Over 11,600 acres of habitat have been treated on this sub-unit since 2001. These treatments should raise the DCI in the next five years.

< Sub-unit #25B - 3,000; DCI is currently at the good/fair threshold.

Depredation issues will continue to be addressed, resulting in some doe harvest. Habitat is not currently being negatively impacted by deer use. Over 1,100 acres of habitat have been treated on this sub-unit since 2001. These treatments should raise the DCI in the next five years.

This Limited Entry unit is too small to support a self-sustaining deer population and deer regularly move between this sub-unit and the Fishlake sub-unit (25A) on the west and, to a lesser degree, the Boulder sub-unit (25C) on the south. In addition, only public lands are open to Limited Entry hunts, while private lands are managed as a general season deer hunt. This land ownership/hunt boundary arrangement complicates management of this sub-unit. In consideration of these issues, the Thousand Lakes sub-unit (25B) should be combined with the Fishlake sub-unit (25A) in the future.

< Sub-unit #25C -12,000; DCI is currently in the fair range.

Depredation issues will continue to be addressed, resulting in some doe harvest. Habitat is not currently being negatively impacted by deer use. Over 6,800 acres of habitat have been treated on this sub-unit since 2001. These treatments should raise the DCI in the next five years.

< Herd Composition – Maintain a region wide three-year average postseason buck:doe ratio ranging from 15-20:100 across the parent unit (Plateau #25). On subunit #25B, where limited-entry hunting is employed, maintain three-year average buck:doe ratios ranging from 25-35 bucks:100 does.

	Objective from past plan (2001)	Long-term Objective	2006-2011 Objective	Change
Plateau, Fishlake # 25A	10,000	10,000	10,000	0
Plateau, Fishlake Thousand Lakes #25B	3,000	3,000	3,000	0
Plateau, Boulder #25C	12,000	12,000	12,000	0
UNIT TOTAL	25,000	25,000	25,000	0

POPULATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

< Population Size - Herd composition and population size will be monitored through post season and spring classification, hunter check stations, harvest surveys and computer modeling.

< Buck Age Structure - Monitor age class structure of the buck population through the use of checking stations, postseason classification, uniform harvest surveys and field bag checks.

< Harvest - The primary means of monitoring harvest will be through the statewide uniform harvest survey. Achieve the target population size by use of antlerless harvest using a variety of harvest methods and seasons. Buck harvest strategies will be developed through the RAC and Wildlife Board process to achieve management objectives for buck: doe ratios.

Limiting Factors (May prevent achieving management objectives)

< Crop Depredation - The Division of Wildlife Resources will maintain aggressive programs to eliminate or lessen the burden of deer depredation on private cultivated and stored agricultural crops. Crop depredation problems will be addressed as provided for in applicable laws, rules and policies, and procedures of Utah's Landowner Assistance Program for big game. When necessary, control hunts will be implemented through the RAC process. When a problem needs immediate attention, local biologists may call depredation hunts and issue mitigation permits to keep deer away from cultivated and stored agricultural crops. These control hunts will be specified in areas where only offending animals will be harvested. Applicable laws, polices, and procedures will also be followed to lessen the burden of big game on private rangelands.

< Habitat - Habitat decline is a critical problem. Opportunities to reverse this trend seem to be diminishing. Because of this long-range decline, the Plateau Unit cannot support the deer herds of earlier years. Increase from current low populations can be achieved, however. Winter browse throughout the unit is old, decadent, and disappearing. The major concern throughout the unit is encroaching pinyon pine and juniper forest. An additional concern is the encroachment of spruce-fir into aspen habitats. The Utah Big Game Range Trend Studies for the Plateau Unit generally show a stable trend. The most notable trends was a general loss of litter cover, vegetative basal cover, and an increased percentage of decadence in key browse species, caused by the long term drought experienced on these ranges. This is expected to turn around with the anticipated end to the state's prolonged pattern of drought. There is no evidence the downward vegetative trends are due to deer use. Attainment of management goals will depend on reversal of recent drought conditions. Excessive habitat utilization will be addressed.

< Predation - The DWR recognizes the need to efficiently and effectively manage predators. The DWR strongly promotes a predator management philosophy and recognizes predator management to be a viable and legitimate wildlife management tool that must be available to wildlife managers when needed.

-The DWR will work cooperatively with the USDA/Wildlife Services to manage coyote populations in areas where deer populations are threatened by coyote.

- The DWR will recommend cougar harvest to benefit deer while maintaining the cougar as a valued resource to assure their future ecological, intrinsic, scientific, educational and recreational values.

< Highway Mortality - Cooperate with the Utah Department of Transportation in construction of highway fences, passage structures and warning signs etc.

< Illegal Harvest - Specific preventive measures will be implemented through Action Plans developed in cooperation with the Law Enforcement section should illegal kill become an identified and significant source of mortality.

< Interspecific competition - No limitation generated by elk/deer interactions has been documented.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

< Develop cooperative programs that encourage public and private land managers to maintain a stable or upward trend in vegetative composition, with emphasis on high use areas, especially around critical agricultural depredation problem areas.

< Encourage vegetation manipulation projects and seeding to increase the availability, abundance and nutritional content of browse, grass, and forb species.

< Deer habitat will be monitored by current long-term vegetative trend studies, pellet trend studies, and seasonal monitoring range tours.

< Condition of deer winter range on Unit 25, as indicated by DWR range trend surveys.

Subunit	Year	Mean DCI score for Subunit	Classification	Unit-specific DCI score range: Poor	Unit-specific DCI score range: Fair	Unit-specific DCI score range: Good
25-A	1999	48	Fair	22-36	37-53	54-71
	2004	36	Fair/poor Threshold			
25-B	1994	51	Fair	20-34	35-52	53-70
	1999	63	Good			
	2004	53	Fair/Good			
25-C	1994	52	Good	20-34	35-52	53-70
	1998	59	Good			
	2003	48	Fair			

PERMANENT RANGE TREND SUMMARIES (Added 2001)

Unit 25A, Plateau/Fish Lake

There are 17 range trend studies on this sub-unit of the Plateau Management Unit. Five of the 17 are on intermediate range. Twelve are on critical winter range. Two of the twelve were established in 1999. The most recent trend data gathered on these sites was in 2004. The five intermediate range sites showed stable soil trends with a stable browse trend and a downward herbaceous understory trend. The critical winter range sites showed a stable soils trend with a stable browse trend and slightly downward herbaceous understory. Overall, the trend studies showed a lack of forbs. Continued drought patterns have been a serious problem on this unit. Currently deer are not in sufficient numbers to damage winter range areas and it is unlikely that they will increase beyond the long-term objective in the next five years. Several thousand acres of important deer habitat have been treated in the last five years on this unit, which should lead to an increase in DCI.

Unit 25B, Plateau/Thousand Lake Mountain

There are six range trend studies on this sub-unit of the Plateau Management Unit.

All six are on critical winter range. The most recent trend data gathered on these sites was in 2004. The study sites showed stable soil and browse trends and a downward herbaceous under story trend. Even though most sites are showing stable trends for herbaceous species, many of the sites would have to be considered in poor condition because of the low frequencies and low diversity of species, especially forbs, on these sites. Continued drought has been a serious problem on this unit. Currently deer are not in sufficient numbers to damage winter range areas and it is unlikely that they will increase beyond the long-term objective in the next five years. Several large habitat enhancement projects have been implemented in important deer habitat in the last five years on this unit, which should lead to an increase in DCI.

Thick pinyon and juniper stands dominate much of the critical winter range throughout the sub-unit, limiting the winter carrying capacity for big game. There is a great potential to provide more forage for big game by thinning or removing the thick stands of pinyon and juniper. In 2004 a habitat project was completed in Red Canyon and Sage Flat. Part of this treatment involved the removal of PJ by cutting and then seeding with grasses and forbs. Removal of the dense PJ stands opens the canopy allowing more sunlight to reach the soils and plants. Another project of this same type is planned to cover the area from Sage Flat south to Shingle Mill Creek. Fieldwork for this project will begin in 2007.

Unit 25C, Plateau/Boulder Mountain

There are 29 range trend study transects on this sub-unit of the Plateau Management Unit. Four of these measure big game and livestock on deer summer range, two are located on intermediate range, and the remaining 23 are on critical winter range. The most recent trend data gathered on these sites was in 2003. The study sites showed stable soils and browse trends. Herbaceous understory trends were down dramatically overall. Many sites, including those on intermediate and summer ranges, have poor herbaceous under stories lack grasses and forbs. Other sites have a stable but poor herbaceous understory. Continued drought conditions have been a serious problem.

Thick pinyon and juniper stands dominate much of the critical winter range on the Boulder sub-unit, limiting the winter carrying capacity for big game. There is a great potential to provide more forage for big game by treating the thick stands of PJ. Removal of the dense PJ stands opens the canopy allowing more sunlight to reach the soils and plants. Removing PJ stands also releases water that can then be used for more desirable species of forage plants. Habitat treatments implemented on this unit since 2001 should lead to an increase in DCI.

Duration of Plan

This unit management plan was approved by the Wildlife Board on _____ and will be in effect for five years from that date, or until amended.

APPENDIX

Unit 25a Plateau, Fishlake Subunit

Sevier, Piute, and Wayne counties - Boundary begins at SR-24 and US-89 at Sigurd; south on SR-24 to SR-72 at Loa; north on SR-72 to I-70; west on I-70 to US-89; south on US-89 to SR-24.

Unit 25b Plateau, Thousand Lake Subunit

Sevier, and Wayne counties - Boundary begins at the junction of SR-24 and SR-72 at Loa; southeast on SR-24 to the Cainville Wash road; north on the Caineville Wash road to the junction of I-70 and SR-72; south on SR-72 to SR-24 at Loa.

Unit 25c Plateau, Boulder Subunit

Garfield, Piute, and Wayne counties - Boundary begins at SR-24 and SR-62; south on SR-62 to SR-22; south on SR-22 to the Antimony-Widtsoe road; south on the Antimony-Widtsoe road to SR-12; east on SR-12 to the Burr Trail at Boulder; east on the Burr Trail road to the Notom Road; north on the Notom Road to SR-24; west on SR-24 to SR-62.